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TAGS: [KCRM](#) [PHUM](#) [KWMN](#) [ELAB](#) [SMIG](#) [ASEC](#) [KFRD](#) [PREF](#) [SN](#)
SUBJECT: SINGAPORE TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS UPDATE

REF: A. SINGAPORE 632

- [1B.](#) SINGAPORE 631
- [1C.](#) SINGAPORE 630
- [1D.](#) STATE 3836
- [1E.](#) SINGAPORE 470
- [1F.](#) SINGAPORE 139
- [1G.](#) 05 SINGAPORE 3614

[¶11.](#) Summary: GOS officials from the Ministries of Home Affairs; Manpower; Community Development, Youth and Sports; and Foreign Affairs met with the E/P Counselor and Embassy officers on March 17 to discuss Singapore's 2005 trafficking situation and enforcement efforts. The GOS provided updated statistics on its law enforcement efforts related to trafficking, explained new measures aimed at combating maid abuse, and detailed the services available to victims in Singapore. This cable provides important information not available when we filed our TIP submission (Refs A, B, C) and should be considered as an addition to that report. End Summary.

2005 Law Enforcement Statistics

[¶12.](#) In 2005, Singapore detained 3,220 foreign sex workers, down significantly from 5,239 sex workers detained in 2004, according to police statistics. Of the sex workers detained, 48, or 1.5 percent, were under 18 years of age (up from 35 in 2004). Police were able to identify 13 pimps or vice abettors who were involved in the underage girls' prostitution: 8 were prosecuted in court, two were issued warnings, and one investigation is still ongoing.

[¶13.](#) Of these 3,220 women, 35 alleged that they were forced, intimidated or tricked into prostitution (up from 16 in 2004). Seven victims did not remain in contact with the police to pursue investigations. On the remaining 28 cases, police were not able to make cases for any trafficking specific charges, but the government was able to successfully prosecute eight people under related charges under the Women's Charter and Immigration Act. For example, in a case involving three Uzbekistani prostitutes, police charged and convicted ten persons involved in their prostitution -- including a private security guard for their hotel who was convicted of corruption and sentenced to four months in jail for turning a blind eye to vice activities. Three cases remain under investigation. In addition, 118 persons were arrested and 76 were prosecuted for pimping or vice-abetting. Police investigated all of these 118 persons to ensure that the sex-workers they worked with were not forced or coerced.

[¶14.](#) Police attributed the drop in the number of prostitutes detained to police enforcement actions aimed at discouraging

the sex trade. (Note: NGOs working on trafficking and vice issues have independently told us that Singapore Police and Immigration officials have been working closely with the local community to improve their monitoring of the sex trade and enforcement of anti-vice laws, and that these efforts have had a significant impact on the sex trade here. (Ref C, sections B and F.) End Note.) Officials from the Police Criminal Investigative Department said that the Anti-Vice Branch, a unit dedicated to fighting organized crime in the vice trade, has stepped up its efforts to enforce anti-vice statutes. The AVB, looking for evidence of organized vice-syndicates operating in Singapore, conducted approximately two major operations per month and about 800 checks or raids on red-light districts and "entertainment establishments" in 2005. In addition, other branches of the police, such as anti-gang units and local police patrols, also routinely do checks or raids in these areas. The AVB has also worked closely with the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) to develop a profile of persons involved in vice syndicates and the sex trade, and has stepped up efforts to deny entry to those they suspected of such activity. For its part, MFA has increased screening and refusals of visa applicants overseas, particularly in China, which is the source country for about 40 percent of the women found in the sex trade here.

¶ 15. Officials from MHA's Criminal Investigative Department told us that their checks, raids, and interviews with all detained prostitutes have yielded little evidence of syndicate or triad involvement in the vice trade. Most of the women, they say, are operating in public, and over 95 percent are in possession of valid travel documents and entry stamps (i.e., implying that vice operators are not holding their documents as a control mechanism). Officials said it was quite common for women to be working informally with an

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agent or lookout of some kind, but that there was no indication of a greater organization behind them.

Vietnamese Brides

¶ 16. E/P Counselor asked for MHA's view of the recent news reports and public outcry here over Vietnamese brides being brought to Singapore to find husbands. Lawrence Tam, Deputy Director for Policy and Operations at MHA said that the government is concerned about the recent cases. Some of the brides have encountered difficult situations after their marriages and sought help from MCYS, he said, in addition to a few criminal cases in which unscrupulous Singapore men tricked the would-be brides and their matchmaking agencies. Tam said that the government has formed an interagency taskforce to look at these recent cases and the matchmaking industry as a whole, and to consider ways to tighten regulation of the industry to prevent abuse.

Child Sex Tourism

¶ 17. Ministry of Home Affairs officials also noted that Parliament has given its preliminary approval to draft laws raising the age of consent for commercial sex to 18 and making laws against sex with children extraterritorially enforceable. According to Lawrence Tam, MHA is now working with other agencies to draft the details of the implementing regulations for the two laws. When those documents are finalized in the next few months, Parliament will formally approve the bills, bringing them into force.

Maid Abuse

¶ 18. The Ministry of Manpower highlighted its new regulations for employment agencies introduced in recent months, including higher penalties for holding an employee's

passport, a new licensing scheme that requires a background check and an exam on laws related to employment agencies for agency directors, and the new demerit system used to track agencies' infractions and revoke licenses (see ref C section G). MOM officials also noted that the directors or owners of any agency that loses its license will be barred from owning or controlling another agency in the future. Since January 2004, the government has revoked three licenses, and refused to renew ten. MOM has also stepped up enforcement against abusive employers. While many cases are dealt with through mediation, the government prosecuted six people for non-payment of wages; in three cases the women got full restitution, in the other three the employers went to jail for failure to pay. Since 2001, 28 people have been jailed for abuse (in addition to the many who have been fined -- around 50 per year). The Ministry requires that all maid agencies be accredited in order to be licensed to operate; as of mid-2005 accrediting bodies require agencies to use a standard contract stipulating a day off at least once a month, although, if the employee agrees, an employer may pay "overtime" in lieu of a rest day.

Victim Assistance

¶9. Officials from the Ministry of Community Development, Youth, and Sports noted that all victims of violence (whether Singaporean or foreign) are eligible for a full range of social services, including medical care, shelter, counseling, assistance with the police, and skills development training. The Ministry of Manpower has a temporary job scheme for victims also available to foreigners, though foreign participants must already possess an immigration status allowing them to work. Ms. Ang Bee Lian of MCYS's Rehabilitation, Protection and Residential Services division said that the government has an interagency meeting on victim assistance approximately every two months, at which as many as 10 government agencies meet to discuss how to improve access and provision of these types of services. Ang said that the government uses six crisis shelters for adults and 18 for children. While none of these shelters are government-owned, they all receive "100 percent funding" from the government for each person assisted. Overall, Ang said, the government prefers that crisis shelters be a last resort, and often tries to find another solution, such as a relative who will take a person in, or foster care, before referring a victim to a shelter. The Singapore government strongly supports private, faith-based institutions undertaking these efforts.

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¶10. The MOM refers most foreign domestic workers who are facing abuse to MCYS shelters if they are unable or unwilling to remain in their employer's home during a mediation process or criminal investigation. For foreign prostitutes who are victims of crime, police will usually first consult with the woman's embassy; either the Police or the Embassy would refer her to a shelter if she decides to remain in Singapore to assist in a criminal investigation.

Comment

¶11. Singapore authorities' intensified efforts in the last year to deny entry to suspected traffickers, vice abettors, and sex workers through enhanced immigration screening, and increased enforcement efforts in red light and entertainment districts appear to have substantially reduced the size of the sex trade here. Despite the substantial drop in the number of women found working in prostitution, prosecutions related to general vice crimes were up, and the police identified a larger number of trafficking victims and possible victims. Although authorities filed no trafficking-specific charges this year, the government prosecuted a larger number of offenders in cases where

trafficking was suspected -- eight in cases where force or coercion were alleged, and eight vice-abettors/pimps identified as working with underaged girls. In addition, the Ministry of Manpower continues to refine its regulation of the maid employment industry to prevent abuse and exploitation of foreign domestic workers, and the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports is working closely both with law enforcement agencies and local NGOs to ensure that all victims of violence have the best care available -- care as good or better than that in any U.S. city. The government's efforts at enforcement and assistance have both constrained the space in which traffickers might operate, and provided an environment in which gives victims the opportunity to come forward safely.

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